Review of: Solomon, Bernard S: On the School of Names in Ancient China

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Solomon, Bernard S.: *On the School of Names in Ancient China* (Monumenta Serica Monograph Series; 64). Sankt Augustin: Steyler Verlag, 2013, 155 pp., ISBN 978-3-8050-0610-1.

"A white horse is not a horse",[1] "a chicken has three legs",[2] "The center of the world is north of Yan and south of Yue",[3] "that which has no thickness and cannot be piled up may be as great as one thousand miles"[4] – these are but a few examples of the dazzling and ostentatious statements associated with the so-called "School of Names" (*mingjia* 名家) of ancient China. It is to two of its alleged main proponents, Hui Shi (惠施, trad. 370–310 BC), presented in the *Zhuangzi* as Zhuang Zhou's intimate friend and favourite disputant, and Gongsun Long (公孫龍, trad. 320–250 BC) that Solomon dedicates his studies (p. 11). Referring to themselves as *bianzhe* 辯者, that is, "disputers", people of their ilk were famous and notorious at the same time. Admired for their eloquence and quick-wittedness, they were deprecated for only "winning over people's mouths" instead of "convincing their hearts".[5] The disdain with which their playfulness and nonchalance were met by fogeyish *ru*-ritualists – the later "Confucians" – like Xunzi and Mengzi is proverbial. And at least in terms of its pointedness and its degree of repudiation such criticism is comparable to Plato's rejection of the sterile logomachy of the sophists – a commonality that has also earned them the designation of "sophists".

On the School of Names in Ancient China is a collection of essays composed between 1967 and 1985. Three of these have been published as independent articles some time ago (chapters 1, 2 and 3[6]). Its belated publication almost thirty years after completion of the last manuscripts in no respect diminishes this book's invaluable contribution to our understanding of what its author calls the ancient Chinese "School of Names". That the essays have eventually been made available in a single collection is the merit of the editors who in an

1 白馬非馬。 *Gongsunlongzi*, "Baimalun", 1. Translation by Solomon, see p. 99.
2 雞足三。 *Gongsunlongzi*, "Tongbianlun", 26. Cf. p. 58.
3 天下之中央燕之北越之南也。 *Zhuangzi*, "Tianxia", 7. Translation by Solomon, see p. 51.
4 無厚不可積也其大千里。 *Zhuangzi*, "Tianxia", 7. Tr. Solomon, see p. 46.
5 能勝人之口，不能服人之心。 *Zhuangzi*, "Tianxia", 7.
6 Solomon 1969 (ch. 1); Solomon 1981–3 (ch. 2–3).

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anonymous epilogue (pp. 155–161) present a short biography of the author along with a summary of the essentials of his studies.

The sequence of the chapters reflects the chronological order in which the respective essays were composed (p. 11). Ch. 1 deals with the paradoxes ascribed to Hui Shi ("The Assumptions of Huizi", pp. 23–56); ch. 2 through 6 are dedicated to individual chapters of the *Gongsunlongzi* (ch. 2 "On Understanding Change" ("Tongbian lun" 通變論), pp. 57–83; ch. 3 "On Names and Reality" ("Mingshi lun" 名實論), pp. 85–98; ch. 4 "The White-Horse Dialogue" ("Baima lun" 白馬論), pp. 99–122; ch. 5 "On the Hard and the White" ("Jianbai lun" 堅白論), pp. 123–134; ch. 6 "On Concepts and Their Instances" ("Zhiwu lun" 指物論), pp. 135–149). Each chapter starts with a translation which is then followed by a detailed discussion and interpretation.

The very title of Solomon's work suggests that he follows traditional accounts on the intellectual world of the Warring States period. The term *mingjia* 名家, only invented by Sima Tan 司馬談 (d. 110 BC) to refer to a particular set of administrative competences, as Kidder Smith has plausibly argued,[7] is taken by Solomon in the sense of Late Han historiography so as to designate a group of teachers and disciples associated with a specific collection of writings – that is, as a "*School* of Names". This is in fact confirmed when Solomon writes in his introduction that he treats the texts transmitted in the *Gongsunlongzi* "as if they are either by Gongsun Long writing in his own person or by others writing in Gongsun Long's, authentic members of the School" (p. 13). On the one hand, this assumption has the clear advantage of relieving Solomon from the duty to consider the impact on his interpretations of the serious philological difficulties affecting his source texts. On the other, this decision runs the danger of limiting the relevance of his observations for the reconstruction of the intellectual history of pre-imperial and early imperial China. Be that as it may, leaving the nagging doubts of philology behind in order to concentrate on the philosophical significance of the texts under investigation instead, Solomon provides a clear and precise analysis that reveals many new and insightful perspectives. His work also displays a deep familiarity with the "philosophical" writings of the pre-imperial period and it is indeed excellently characterised in the editor's epilogue, where Solomon's contributions are compared to meditations in a Cartesian sense, skilfully entwining both doubt and analysis (p. 159).

In an (uncredited) (Late-)Wittgensteinian mood, Solomon gets involved with the language games encountered in the texts, considering their linguistic playfulness as the indispensable clue to any appropriate understanding. In an

7 "Mingjia is simply that portion of administrative practice that emphasizes the formal relations between an official and his supervisor." Smith 2003: 143.

illuminating analogy in his introduction, Solomon compares the statements of the *Gongsunlongzi* to sentences uttered during a game of Monopoly: It is only by virtue of our knowledge of the rules of that game that we are able to recognise what a Monopoly player's words actually mean. For him, it is therefore the rules of "the game [...] called the School of Names [...] which we must discover" in order to detect the true meaning of what otherwise appears as mere nonsense. In Solomon's view, the reader's attempts at resolving the conundrums of this game unveils to him the intricacies of language itself rather than asserting anything of the "world of objects" to which it is commonly thought to refer to: The texts attributed to the "School of Names" thus reveal an "interest in language *qua* language" (p. 14). For Solomon, Hui Shi's so-called paradoxes represent a veritable "technique of the 'paradoxes'" (p. 25; for illustrations see, e.g., p. 40–41, fn. 14). His attempt to read the language puzzles associated with the "School of Names" in terms of a "method" of demonstration certainly represents a highly instructive and promising aspect of Solomon's approach. His additional assumption, however, that this technique by itself *a priori* excludes the possibility that the riddles might also disclose new insights into the physical world seems neither well-argued nor immediately plausible. The conscious play with linguistic ambiguity might just as well provide one with a means indirectly to express certain observations on language and its relation to reality, all the more so in a language like Classical Chinese where nominalising morphology and adnominal determiners are too poorly developed to play the game of hypostatisation so much cherished by the Mediterranean philosophical tradition.

At first sight, it may seem that Solomon's Monopoly analogy merely gestures at a banality: If there is a game, there are implicit rules which an attentive observer is able to detect. Unless we commit ourselves to seeking these regularities, the language puzzles associated with the "School of Names" are bound to remain in the dark. However, if these language jokes were but dull nonsense, how would it be possible to explain the continued fascination with these texts by generations of scholars and the fact that they have been transmitted to the present day? Solomon's remark in fact points towards even more relevant and far-reaching consequences: If such translations as "chickens are three-footed" or "a white horse is not a horse" (p. 14) are nonsensical or contradictory, this does by no means imply that the same is true for the original Chinese expressions. The "nonsense" of these expressions in the first instance is an effect of English grammar which forces the translator to follow the rules of inflection and to use direct or indirect articles: What is perfectly possible in Chinese, namely to leave *undecided* whether by *ji* 雞 one refers to one or more than one chicken or whether *ma* 馬 refers to the sorrel grazing in front of me or to horses in general, is impossible in English: The morpho-syntactic rules determining the

construction of English sentences require for the great majority of words to be marked for singular or for plural. Likewise, syntax imposes the use of articles, and, in many cases, these define whether the word they determine is to be interpreted as a particular ("*the* horse") or as a universal ("*a* horse").[8] Thus, what is left implicit in Chinese *has to be* made explicit in English, where we have to appeal to what appears to us as "non-literal" or merely "rhetorical" uses in order to secure a sound interpretation. The (Classical) Chinese case, however, is fundamentally different: The virtual lack of (non-derivative) morphology allows for leaving things unspecified. If the language games of the *Gongsunlongzi* are not mere nonsense, they might well have been intended to highlight certain distinctions that are not overtly reflected in the surface structure of the language and hence not immediately available to the listener or reader. The default interpretation of many sentences would indeed amount to nonsensical or contradictory statements: That a white horse is not a horse is clearly wrong, and that this was considered to be so in ancient China as well is nicely confirmed by early anecdotes about the traveller who invokes the "white horse paradox" in his intention to avoid the payment of customs for his white horse, just to be rebuked by an assiduous officer. However, this still does not mean that the sentence *Bai ma fei ma* 白馬非馬 is *false*.[9] Rather, the failure of the default reading forces the interpreter to look for another interpretation that might furnish a sound interpretation. Solomon thus is doubtless right: There are rules behind the "game of the School of names", and these rules are defined by the grammar of Classical Chinese. Neither is "semantic ambiguity" simply tantamount to sheer obscurity, nor does "syntactic variation" imply overall arbitrariness. It is doubtless one of the formidable merits of Solomon's book to pay due attention to the linguistic complexity of the use of apparent paradoxes or conundrums in ancient Chinese thought.

8 Of course, interpretation usually is not as straightforward as this. In synecdochal uses, the definite article can also determine a general term, and a singular marker can have a plural reference: In "the lion is a ferocious animal", the definite article does not refer to a particular instance of the class of lions, but rather to all members of the class. Likewise, marking of grammatical singular does not determine that the proposition is only about a single particular lion.

9 When Fraser 2012 notes that "[…] what we can say is that Gongsun Long won fame by advocating a claim that any competent speaker of his language would have judged false, namely that 'a white horse is not a horse.'" he is thus arguably mistaken, as his judgement refers to the English translation rather than to the Chinese original, which has viable readings diverging from the default reading. It is this *default reading* which corresponds to the English sentence Fraser writes and which, as he correctly points out, clearly represents a false proposition.

Ch. 1 deals with the ten so-called "paradoxes" of Huizi as transmitted in the "Tianxia"-chapter of the *Zhuangzi*. Solomon makes it clear at the very beginning that only a minor part of these statements can be characterised as "paradoxes" in a proper sense and that the term "teaser" would probably be a better choice (p. 24, fn. 1). In his view, one crucial commonality of all of Huizi's "paradoxes" is that they equally challenge our alleged "tendency to resist the convergence of contraries" (e.g., p. 47, passim) by showing that, in fact, there are quite a few cases where doing so is perfectly rational and meaningful. The strongest part of Solomon's analysis is his mathematically informed interpretation of those paradoxes that include terms of comparison, be it the extensive dimension of "great" vs. "small" or the intensive relation between "similarity" vs. "difference".

Ch. 2 through 6 are each dedicated to a chapter of the extant *Gongsunlongzi*. As for this text, A.C. Graham's meticulous philological studies[10] have resulted in a consensus about the spurious nature of most of its parts. This in turn has certainly contributed to the fact that studies on what Graham had identified as the "corrupted chapters" have remained scant.[11] Against this background, Solomon's study, reminding us of the relevance of these texts widely neglected in the field for decades, is without doubt an invaluable contribution in itself. His interpretations may not always be entirely convincing, but their elaborateness and profundity patently show that *all* parts of the *Gongsunlongzi* can lead to valuable and instructive interpretations relevant for our reconstruction of traditional Chinese thought – independently of the more particular question of whether or not they are truly representative for the pre-imperial period.

Like ch. 1 on Huizi's paradoxes, ch. 2 and 3, discussing the chapters "Understanding Change" and "On Names and Reality" of the *Gongsunlongzi*, had already been published some thirty years ago. As especially his interpretations of "Understanding Change" are key to his reading of the remaining parts of the collection, I shall nonetheless discuss them in some detail.

Solomon reads "Understanding Change" as an investigation of the problematic relationship of part and whole advancing in three steps. The first part starts with a discussion of contrasting uses of quantitative terms: a literal sense of numerals (*two* as a sum) is opposed to a metaphorical sense that refers to a new, conceptually distinct "unity" (*two* in the sense of a unity, that is, a *pair*) (p. 68). In his view, the second part, then proceeds to discuss the relation of wholes to the parts of which they are composed, illustrating the wholes by a

10 Graham 1956; a revised version of the article is included in Graham 1990.

11 In his doctoral dissertation, Kandel 1974 presents commented translations of all chapters of the *Gongsunlongzi*.

number of animals, the parts by what appears to be their defining constituent parts. The third part eventually concludes the discussion of part and whole by addressing the situation where wholes (the "correct" colours) themselves become parts (of the "mixed colours").

According to the present reviewer, Solomon's discussion of the so-called animal examples in the second part of "Understanding Change" is particularly enlightening. He claims that "most translators of this dialogue into Western languages [...] [took] the Chinese terms for the animals [...] as renderings of their universals" (p. 65), concluding that, read in this way, the alleged claims of "Understanding Change" are outright contrary to fact. As an alternative, Solomon suggests to interpret the animal terms as representing individuals instead. Individuals can be "faulty replicas" of universals. An individual remains part of the class to which it belongs even if it does not possess all defining properties of this class: A polled ox or a docked ram do not cease to be part of the classes of oxen or sheep. To illustrate this point, Solomon invokes an image of "a parade of oxen, each ox representing a stage of growth from the least developed form to the most developed, like separate frames in a strip of film, where teeth, horns, tails, coats, and feet stand out in clear details. And let us bear in mind that, however, (sic!) we may have settled upon the meaning of 'stage,' between any two 'successive' stages we can always find a third that would have served as well; in brief, it is a dense parade not unlike that of numbers where between any two there can always be found a third, or that of points in space, where no two that we may settle upon in imagination can be said to be adjacent. [...] and should two parades of oxen cut across each other where calf meets bull, we might wonder what entitles them both to bear the name *ox*" (p. 74). These lines, so clearly inspired by mathematical reasoning, can be related to ancient Chinese thought in a highly instructive way. There is a short passage in the "Zeyang" 則陽-chapter of the *Zhuangzi* – not quoted by Solomon himself – which addresses the very question whether and if so, to what extent, the presence of all indispensable or defining parts of a thing of a particular kind – in the example it is a horse in front of an observer – is a sufficient condition for identifying the present thing as an instance of that very kind.[12] The

12 今指馬之百體而不得馬，而馬係於前者，立其百體而謂之馬也。 "Now, you don't get a horse by pointing at the many parts of a horse, but if you attach 'horse' to what is in front of you, you determine it as a horse by establishing these as the many parts of it (i.e. a horse)." (*Zhuangzi*, "Zeyang" 10, translation mine). In other words, what are to be counted as the parts of a horse is defined by the concept of *horse*, not by the parts themselves that make up a horse – and dissociated from the concept of *horse* these parts simply lack the criterion that unites them *as parts* of a specific kind.

"Zeyang"-chapter not only attests that there were discussions in ancient China of the relation of kinds to their defining characteristics that indeed conceived of defining characteristics as parts of the whole which this kind represents, but it also suggests that its authors did not consider this part-whole relation as sufficient to define kinds: kinds cannot simply be equated to bunches of characteristics. Solomon's reading thus arrives at a highly plausible interpretation of "Understanding Change". As in the above-mentioned passage of the "Zeyang"-chapter, its authors negate the assumption that a kind can be defined by the sum of its constituent parts. If such would be the case, then something that does not display all of these constitutive parts, e.g. an ox without horns or without front teeth, clearly would not count as an instance of that kind – an assumption which obviously belies actual language use. On the whole, Solomon's analysis suggests that Graham may after all have been too rash with his influential conclusion that – once compared to their Mohist counter-pieces – the animal examples of "Understanding Change" are easily recognised as the "nonsense" they "appear [...] to be".[13]

Solomon's discussion of the colour examples of the third section of "Understanding Change" argues that here the text considers the situation when "wholes [...] themselves become parts" (p. 77): The wholes "green" (*qing* 青) and "white" (*bai* 白) turn into parts when "green" is tinted by "white", or "white" tinged with "green". Recognising that the resumption of the terms "horse" (*ma* 馬) and "chicken" (*ji* 雞) in this context establishes a structural analogy between the second and third parts of the chapter, Solomon plausibly argues that the question here is about "correctness" (*zheng* 正) – an attribute referring to pure colours as opposed to mixed or intermediate colours like "jade green" (*bi* 碧), just as the discussion before was about the concept of *si zu* 四足 – "four-footedness" (see, e.g. p. 79). Another convincing detail of Solomon's analysis is his decision not to interpret *li* 驪, customarily translated as "black (of horses)", as a colour term. Rather, he takes it to mean "in double harness", conceiving of it as a term referring to a particular way of combining two entities, in this case, the two "correct", i.e. pure, colours of "green" and "white" (pp. 76–77). In sum, Solomon's analysis of "Understanding Change" succeeds in convincingly substantiating the value of this difficult chapter of the *Gongsunlongzi*.

In ch. 3 Solomon discusses the "Ming shi"-chapter ("On Names and Reality") of the *Gongsunlongzi*. Starting with what he takes as Gongsun Long's definition of the term "real" (*shi* 實) – according to which something is real if it is treated in accord with the concept of which it is the object (p. 88), Solomon notes that "some 'things,' though they exist, may not be 'real,' for they may not yet be the objects of any concept, and even if they are, unless one treats them in a manner

13 Graham 1956: 162.

appropriate to the concept, they are not 'real' [...]" (p. 89). For him, the chapter thus discusses how the concepts implied by names and titles and the things in the world are to be related to each other, how a thing's "place in theory" and its "place in practice" are to be balanced, that is, "corrected" (*zheng* 正). Solomon observes that correctness is here thought to depend on the concept enshrined in a title, and it is the behaviour that is measured against someone's title rather than the other way round (pp. 92, 93): The question of finding an appropriate title for someone behaving in a specific way appears to be irrelevant.

Ch. 4 of Solomon's study discusses the "White Horse Dialogue", doubtlessly the most famous chapter of the extant *Gongsunlongzi*, widely regarded as one of the more straightforward parts of the collection. Solomon underlines the importance of the interplay of ambiguity and disambiguation for understanding this dialogue, claiming that "in the literature on the subject of this dialogue [...] this ambiguity is generally ignored," the "almost universal tendency" being "to regard the expression as unambiguous and to make a choice of meaning unaffected by the argument that follows, which leads one through the dialogue to a conclusion that is unconvincing at best and mystifying at worst" (p. 104). It is the ambiguity that one and the same term *ma* 馬 ("horse") can refer both to the concept of *horse* and to the material object called "horse" around which his interpretation revolves (cf. e.g. pp. 110, 115). Thus, Solomon observes that Gongsun Long's contender at one time in the dialogue (Solomon's section 3) uses the verbs *you* 有 ("to have") and *wu* 無 ("to not have") to govern the terms *bai ma* "white horse" and *ma* "horse" which, in his view, compels the reader to interpret these terms as referring to the material objects white horse and horse. When in his response Gongsun Long then invokes the two verbs *qiu* 求 ("to look for") and *zhi* 致 ("to bring forward"), Solomon argues, one has to measure the coloured horses which one sees and the material horses one is later to have against what one has in mind when looking, that is, "his reply confronts us at one stroke with three levels of discourse, one about terms, one about their material objects, and one about the concepts reposing in these terms" (p. 115). Two weak points of Solomon's analysis in my view deserve special mention: First, the "Baima lun" contains one rather obscure passage (in Solomon's numbering, 10d). Basing himself on the "Old Commentary" ascribed to the Song scholar Xie Jiang (Xishen) 謝絳 (希深) (994–1039), A.C. Graham has proposed that the text is corrupt at this point.[14] It is surprising that Solomon chooses to ignore the difficulty and controversial status of this passage. Second, his translations at times appear to be problematic. This is probably best illustrated by the following case in

14 Graham 1965: 149. This suggestion is acknowledged, e.g., by Harbsmeier, but regarded as unnecessary for arriving at a plausible understanding of the text by him and by others. See Harbsmeier 1998: 299. Cf. also Indraccolo 2010: 135.

point: Solomon himself not only admits but actually underscores the crucial role of the distinction between the expressions *you*/*wu ma* ("having"/"not having horse") on the one hand and simple *ma*/*fei ma* ("horse"/"not-horse") on the other. However, his translation sometimes does not only not reflect this distinction but entirely blurs it. In 9d, he renders 以黃馬爲非馬，而以白馬爲有馬 (*yi huang ma wei fei ma, er yi bai ma wei you ma*) as "To regard [the concept of] yellow horse as not tantamount to [the concept of] horse, and to regard *[having a]* white horse as tantamount to having a horse, [...]" (emphasis added). Solomon inserts here a "having" where, in the Chinese text, there is no corresponding *you* 有. It goes without saying that this emendation deeply affects the interpretation of the passage. What is more, it does so in a way obliterating what the Chinese original clearly disambiguates. Oddly, Solomon leaves this point uncommented.

In ch. 5 Solomon addresses the "Jian Bai"-chapter ("On the White and the Hard"). This concise analysis is basically in line with most other interpretations of this piece, taking the dialogue to be a reflection about the relationship between knowledge and being, between epistemology and ontology: Where are the qualities of colour and texture when they are not perceived? In my view, there are again some (minor) problems with the translation. For instance, one can virtually exclude that the term *ran* 然, literally "to be so", may in fact be understood as "to be so by its nature" (p. 128), as suggested by Solomon. Rather, *ran* as a technical term refers to an assignment of a quality to something already identified (*shi* 是) by another word or expression – most prominently but not exclusively so in the "Smaller Pick" chapter of the *Mozi*. As the dialogue under discussion deals with the question of the relation between qualities and objects instantiating them, it is highly probable that, here too, we have to read *ran* in this rather technical sense. If this is true, it is rather unlikely to refer to that aspect of the stone which "is naturally so" of it or – put somewhat differently – essential to it.

The concluding chapter of Solomon's book eventually addresses the most delicate piece of the entire *Gongsunlongzi*, the "Zhiwu lun". Specialists are not only unable to agree as to the meaning of the central terms appearing in the title of this piece, z*hi* 指, literally "finger", in a verbal reading "to point at", and *wu* 物 "thing". This highly repetitive text is opaque to the degree that scholars even disagree on whether it is a dialogue or not. In view of this, any interpretation for obvious reasons heavily depends on its presuppositions. One of the merits of Solomon's interpretation is to make explicit how he understands and complements the famous initial line of the text which reads *wu mo fei zhi er zhi fei zhi* 物莫非指而指非指 (lit. something like "No thing is not an index, but an index is not an index", my translation). Making sense of this expression essentially means disambiguating the two instances of the term *zhi* in order to dissolve what otherwise is an outright contradiction – *zhi* is not *zhi*. Solomon

decides to interpret the second instance of *zhi* as a shorthand of *suo zhi* 所指, that is, "what is indicated" (p. 140). It appears to me that this is problematic. There is a significant difficulty with this solution which is at the basis of many interpretations of this enigmatic text. If there is one rigid rule in Classical Chinese syntax, it is probably that, in nominalisations by means of *suo* 所, the relative pronoun always refers to the second complement of the verb in case – that is, the direct object with transitive verbs, the locus with verbs of location, etc. Especially in the former case of transitive verbs, the translation of this construction typically involves a passive participle: the wall *that* is *painted*, the house *that* is *possessed*, the thing *that* is *pointed at*. It is clear that this does not allow us to infer that the absence of *suo* excludes the possibility of a nominalised structure to be translated by means of a passive particle. However, if one takes the second instance of *zhi* here to mean "the thing [that is] indicated" one has to explain why *zhi* is *not* marked by the expected *suo*. The absence of *suo* from the present context in my view clearly favours an active reading of *zhi* in the sense "the pointing", "the pointer". The interpretation of the entire "Zhiwu lun" strongly depends on how one disambiguates the various instances of *zhi*. It does therefore seem imperative to look for parallel uses of this word in other roughly contemporary texts that might eventually confirm one or the other of the many possible readings. I am rather sceptical, however, that straightforward parallels can be found which shed more light on this arcane testimony of linguistic playfulness. Be that as it may, as with the other chapters of the *Gonsunlongzi*, Solomon's decision to interpret the two instances of *zhi* in terms of "concepts" as opposed to their "instances" eventually yields a coherent and consistent interpretation of the "Zhiwu lun".

On the School of Names in Ancient China is an invaluable contribution to a better understanding of the sometimes extremely difficult texts transmitted under this label. At times, Solomon's language, which abounds in qualifications and parentheses, is not easy to follow. But to a considerable extent, this may simply be an effect of the difficulty of the source texts he investigates. Solomon often complements his own translations by alternative English and French translations. This can be instructive, as it shows the extreme degree of possible variation, and it may now and then act as a useful corrective. Yet, it remains questionable whether there is much to be gained when, in some chapters, these alternative translations are given for virtually each and every one of Solomon's own translations, sometimes covering more than half a page. It would probably have been more useful either to discuss alternative translations at some length or simply to leave them out.

On the whole, the merits of Solomon's study by far outweigh its shortcomings. Still, this book is bound to remain a study for specialists. In spite of its many instructive discussions, it is essentially a close and insightful reading of some of

the central texts and fragments attributed to the "School of Names". It is regrettable that the author omits to situate his observations in a larger philosophical context, something which might possibly have enlarged the circle of potential readers. At the same time, the study leaves problems of textual criticism largely unmentioned, an aspect that might diminish the chances for a broad reception by more philologically oriented sinologists. Solomon's investigations on the "method" and "technique" of "paradox" draw our attention to a crucial though widely underestimated aspect of the writings of the "School of Names". To advance on the promising path Solomon's studies have opened will require further systematisation and contextualisation. Without doubt, this will not only enhance our understanding of the strategies of these texts to use linguistic ambiguity for the sake of disambiguation and clarification but complete and enrich our picture of ancient Chinese thought in general.

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